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ABSTRACT

As soon as new teachers entered schools and classrooms, they seemed to be sorely frustrated with trying to make sense of what to do. They described a deep sense of being lost and not knowing which way to turn to find their way. The question was how to support them to realize the power and promise of drawing upon what they already knew about literacy from their own life. Consequently, alternative uses of the personal literacy history narrative were considered and an ongoing inquiry into the relationship between this and their beginning practice was designed. This paper describes and discusses an emerging inquiry that was constructed out of these questions. The paper begins by explaining the context of the inquiry--the nature of work as teacher educators and the scope of the inquiry project. It then presents glimpses of the insights, realized by a few beginning teachers who participated in the project, into the significance of teachers' personal literacy histories for their literacy practice. The paper concludes with a discussion of what was learned from teachers about what they see in their practice by telling their stories first. Includes a table. (Contains 22 references.) (NKA)

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BEGINNING TEACHERS AND THEIR SITUATIONS OF LITERACY PRACTICE: LEARNING TO REFLECT BY TELLING THEIR OWN STORIES

A Paper presented at
the International Reading Association's 19th World Congress on Reading,
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"We all have a tendency to jump into an interpretive or judgmental mode,
but it is important to begin by simply telling the story."
--Simon Hole
--Grace Hall McEntee

How often have you been puzzled by the appearance of something, looking at it over and over with simultaneous interest and skepticism, certain that although it seems okay something about it is still wrong? As teachers we are familiar with this, because we often encounter such incongruities when we examine our practice. We have come to understand that we must complement our reflection with another view of our practice from a completely different angle. This kind of refractive examination, or distinct change in the direction of our view, can indeed open up possibilities to see what was seemingly invisible before.

Recently one evening after dinner, Nina, the two-year-old daughter of some very good friends, sat at the table bewildered by a similar problem with a popsicle. It was time for dessert, and she wanted to eat a popsicle treat, just like her big brother, Von, had. Nina's dad unwrapped one from its paper package and took a big bite before giving it to her, thinking that this would make eating it more manageable for her. Instead, Nina became severely upset that her popsicle was now different than it was originally. As she continued to balk, her dad quickly took it back, chewed it to hide the noticeable shape of the bite and, then, gave it back. He tried to assure her that it was now "fixed," but she looked disappointedly at it. She seemed to know something wasn't quite right. With her gaze she seemed to suggest that she knew it was not what it used to be, but she couldn't say for sure. Nina was not convinced that her popsicle had been restored—though she couldn't quite figure out why.

And so it is with teaching. We spend enormous amounts of time thinking through, mulling over, and conjecturing about what will best encourage, nudge and scaffold our students to be competent inquisitive learners. However, in order to see new possibilities for our teaching, we need to do more than simply hold up the mirror image of our practice in front of us. We must

look at our practice from different angles to glean new inisghts as to why they appear the way they do or how they might become what else we want them to be.

One of the overarching goals of our work with either beginning or experienced teachers is to scaffold the further development of their understandings about literacy learning (e.g., "phonics is the best method for teaching children to read and write" or "in whole language classrooms, children do not learn phonics"). Students are, therefore, introduced to current research-based knowledge about language acquisition, emergent and proficient literacy, and integrated curriculum development (Au, mason & Scheu, 1995; Braunger & Lewis, 1997). Our aim has been to encourage them to be knowledgable and thoughtful practitioners.

In addition, like many of our colleages who teach literacy methods courses for beginning teachers, we have invited our students to compose a narrative of their personal literacy histories (Taylor, 1990; Fox, 1996). The purpose of this task is to help them make more explicit what they think literacy is, what they consider to be evidence of literacy, and what they believe about becoming literate. For this assignment, students usually constructed mesmerizing narratives about the importance of friends, family and teachers; portrayed the role of music or drama or sports; retold fond memories of being read to or hearing stories told at bedtime; and revealed their sense of the magic of trying their own hand at reading and writing. Students always expressed some degree of reluctance, but once they began writing they soon cultivated interest and enthusiasm in accomplishing the task. Although the narratives were interesting and endearing, we recently realized a very important challenge: How are their stories relevant to their beginning practice, particularly their literacy practice? --After all, this is the point of teacher education.

An Emerging Inquiry

As soon as students entered schools and classrooms, we often found them to be sorely frustrated with trying to make sense of what to do. They described a deep sense of being lost and not knowing which way to turn to find their way. We wondered why it was so difficult for them

to synthesize their understandings and bring these to bear on their emergent practice. We began to question how we could support them, over time, to realize the power and promise of drawing upon what they already knew, especially what they knew about literacy from their own life experience, to see the problems and possibilities in their situations of literacy practice. And, we wondered how to help them cast their reflections on their practice from new directions.

Consequently, we decided to consider alternative uses of the personal literacy history narrative; and, we designed an on-going inquiry into the relationship between this and their beginning practice. Our sense, as Nina helped us to see, was that something wasn't quite right. In other words, we needed to look with our students at what they understood in a new way, and support their development as critical-reflective practitioners.

In this paper, we describe and discuss an emerging inquiry that we have constructed out of these questions. We begin by explaining the context of our inquiry--the nature of our work as teacher educators and the scope of our inquiry porject. Then we present glimpses of the insights, realized by a few beginning teachers who participated with us in this project, into the significance of teachers' personal literacy histories for their literacy practice. And, we conclude with a discussion of what we learned from teachers about what they see in their practice by telling their stories first.

The Context

Our inquiry is situated in a context of three intersecting frameworks, with one main point of intersection being the development of teachers' epistemology, or ways of knowing about their emerging practice. The frameworks include key principles derived from constructivism and critical theory, the scholarship on reflective practice, and teacher knowledge and teacher research. Critical, constructivist tenets are the underpinnings of our work as teacher researchers and our students' learning to be reflective practitioners. Thus, in this context we seek to understand the

problems and possibilities for teachers to use their personal literacy histories to situate their literacy practices.

Constructivism and critical theory. The teacher education program is a collaborative endeavor with teachers and families from several local neighborhood public schools; it is designed within a critical, constructivist philosophy. One primary goal has been to help beginning teachers become practitioners who construct their own knowledge and apply that knowledge to their work in classrooms. The program requires students to spend extensive time in public school classrooms each semester, attending class on-site and collaborating with a cooperating teacher in intern-like practicum experiences.

While numerous scholars have articulated constructivist and critical theory principles for pedagogy (Lambert et al., 1995), the work of Jerome Bruner (1960; 1966), John Dewey (1938), and Lev Vygotsky (1986), specifically, identified the principles by which we strive to teach and learn. In short, we try to shape our teaching and learning by always keeping the following ideas in mind:

- Knowledge is constructed by the learner and co-constructed by a community of learners;
- Language is a heuristic critical for constructing knowledge;
- Learners personally imbue experiences with meaning;
- Learning is a social and cultural activity, enriched by shared inquiry;
- Reflection and metacognition are essential to the construction of knowledge;
- Learners play an important role in understanding their own learning; and,
- What learners learn varies and is often unpredictable.

In terms of critical theory, the Freirian notions (Freire, 1993) that 1) knowing and knowledge are embedded in cultural, historical and sociopolitical contexts and 2) reality is narrated by social conventions and values have also inspired our program design. Thus we urge beginning teachers to understand the institution of school—even the phenomena of teaching and learning—and the experiences of their own lives in light of these two keystone tenets. And, beginning teachers' then try to frame their reflections on their lives and their situations of literacy practice in light of these.

Reflective practice. Teachers have long been interested in reflection as an important quality to develop in order to know and better understand themselves, their teaching and their students' leaning (Carr & Kemis, 1986). The kind of reflection teachers practice is inded complex. A teacher must reflect not only on what just happened and how it happened, but she must also examine her relationships with all of her students, considering their special interests and identities as well as her own, across varying spans of time. And, she does all of this in almost every moment of teaching and in what often seems to be every other moment of her time. For a teacher, reflection is a way of knowing.

Reflection is especially important with respect to literacy education because literacy is as much a particularly human endeavor as teaching is. Literacy is a phenemon that is personal and social, cultural and political, and a consequence of how people make meaning of their shared and different lived experiences. It is, in other words, a means for people to sustain and change their relationships with one another. And, for literacy teachers to make sense of all this, reflection is unmistakably important.

Every step along the way through the teacher education program, there are formal and informal opportunities for beginning teachers to reflect on their emergent teaching, both in the company of peers and by themselves (e.g., journaling, public dialogue, conferencing with peers or cooperating teacher). Our sense of the role of reflection in teaching is informed by three perspectives: Donald Schon (1983), Ruth Vinz (1996), and Carol Pope (1999). These scholars explain how teachers engage in reflection as an integral manner of their practice and draw upon it as a powerful source for seeing what cannot otherwise be seen.

Donald Schon (1983) recognized "the crisis of confidence in professional knowledge" and articulated a robust understanding of the role of reflection in developing professional knowledge. He explained that:

> When a practitioner reflects in and on his practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of knowing-in-practice which he brings to them. He may reflect on the tacit norms and appreciations

> which underlie a judgment, or on the strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behavior. He may reflect on the feeling for a situation which has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which he has framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional context. (p.62)

Schon's argument reveals that reflection is a crucially significant epistemology of the competent practitioner. Reflection in and on action is rigorous, sophisticated, and as such empowers the teacher "to cope with the unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice." (p. ix)

Looking more specifically at English Language Arts teachers, Vinz (1996) examined the iterative process through which a remarkable teacher passes in order to compose her teaching life. In describing what she terms as "practice centered reflection," teachers focused on informing or enhancing their practice by making problematic the situation under investigation. Teachers identify what happened, analyze why it happened, and speculate on possible changes. She posed these important questions for continuous, recursive reflection:

a) What do teachers reflect upon and what forms does that reflection take?
b) What is the relationship between the teachers' verbalized understanding of reflection and their use of reflection in planning and teaching classes?
c) What are the implications of answers to these questions for teachers and teacher educators? (p. 84)

While Schon (1983) and Vinz (1996) referred to "reflection" as the process teachers use to know and understand their practice, Pope (1999) discussed how it is not enough, at least for her, to hold her teaching up to a mirror. Instead, she suggested that a reflexive look at one's teaching involves both reflection and refraction--the deliberate act of turning one's own reflection around and upside-down, challenging and re-interpreting one's perceived reality of teaching and learning. She described the arduous process of engaging with her students in a dialogic examination of her teaching and their learning. Moreover, she explained her evolving model of reflexive pedagogy that empowers her students and her to create a "reflection and refraction environment" in class.

These three orientations provided a scaffold for us to generate our own conceptualization of reflective practice, construct a pedagogy that enacts it, and research our questions. Moreover,

we have come to understand that reflection occurs in the midst of teaching and in the open spaces between teaching moments; it is a teacher's epistemology, which empowers her to analyze and evaluate her practice and compose the subsequent texts of her teaching life; and, it is a complexly natured process that involves casting multiple views from multiple directions. Again, it is important to do more than simply discuss the role of reflection in teaching; rather, there is value in renewing one's understandings, learning how teachers participate in their own critically reflective practice and seeing what they then see.

Teacher research. We began to realize what was somehow missing, or unmistakably underrepresented, in our approach to promoting the practice of reflection through random and routine conversations about students' accomplishments and quandaries. It quickly became evident that in the press to make the wealth of knowledge about literacy acquisition and development and teaching accessible to novice teachers, what they already knew about literacy and becoming literate too easily overlooked. Thus, we designed this inquiry around questions about the ways in which beginning teachers' narratives of their personal literacy histories redirected their reflections in and on their situations of literacy practice. Specifically, we asked: What do beginning teachers learn about literacy and becoming literate by articulating their own stories? What do their stories help them see in their practice? Stemming from these questions we imagined the promise of an on-going, iterative teacher research project situated the twin contexts of our teaching and that of our students. Since this study emerged from the very questions we asked ourselves and each other while genuinely struggling to make sense of our own teaching, we consider this to be a kind of oral inquiry of teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1994). Moreover, we were cautious that its methodology would be sensitive to what we could not have expected. And, like the early work of Yetta Goodman, Dorothy Watson, and Carolyn Burke (1987) on miscue analysis, we have tried to construct methods that are responsive to what we see when we explore and examine rather than ones that direct our exploration and presuppose our examination.

Not all of our students participated in every aspect of our inquiry because it would be impossible to comprehend the vast universe of possible meanings. Instead, in this preliminary inquiry we collaborated with a small but diverse group of willing teachers who share our curiosity about and interest in better understanding reflective practice. Three novice teachers were invited because of their different interests in literacy and teaching as well as their diverse ethnolinguistic and sociocultural backgrounds (see Table 1).

Table 1. Abbreviated descriptions of the three beginning teacher participants' personal and professional backgrounds.

Name-- Personal and Professional Background
Jamie-- Pre-service teacher, middle level education Traditional Student, Graduate Study + Certification Male/Tuscarora-Iriquois & White/Middle Class Tuscarora-English bilingual
Liz-- In-service teacher, elementary education Traditional Student, Undergraduate Study Female/White-Euro-American/Middle Class English monolingual
Shelley--In-service teacher, middle level education Non-traditional Student, Graduate Student + Certification Female/Jewish & White/Middle Class Spanish-English bilingual

There are four interconnected aspects of our methodology: autobiography, interviewing, observation, analysis. Although we can point to a definite starting point for our study (i.e., writing a narrative of their personal literacy history), these methods have overlapped one another as they recur again and again. We think of this process as a series of repeated, simultaneously occurring patterns that partially envelop one another, much like the spiral of a helix. As teachers were involved in reading and reconstructing their autobiographies, they were also giving interviews, observing and being observed, and co-interpreting the development of their literacy practice.

To begin, we invited all of our students to write the story of their personal literacy history in the genre of autobiography. For this endeavor, we guided them through extensive reading and

writing processes toward a goal of creating a well articulated narrative that reflects as many of the rich qualities of their literate lives as possible. They crafted narratives of their personal literacy histories as part of their work in either an undergraduate or graduate literacy education course.

To write this text, several steps were necessary. First, a writer must become familiar with the particular qualities of this genre; we began by providing three kinds of opportunities:

1. Exploring the genre of autobiography (e.g., Margaret Mooney's (1998) *Text forms and features.*) Several resources were used to highlight the most salient qualities of autobiography.
2. Reading an autobiography by an educator (e.g., *Teacher* by Sylvia Ashton Warner, 1963; *Educating Esme* by Esme Raji Codell, 1999). Students were to read a text of their choice and discuss various aspects of it, comparing the development of their own autobiography with the text of their choice. We also discussed different kinds of "teacher" qualities they hoped to acquire and construct in their own beginning teaching experiences.
3. Studying biography and autobiography written for children and young adults (see bibliography). For example, *Learning to Swim in Swaziland* (Leigh, 1993) and *Tales of a Gambling Grandma* (Khalsa, 1988) were offered as models of different kinds of narratives with different formats. Discussion centered on which attributes of the genre they noticed, formats might be appropriate for their own work (e.g., picture book, photo album) and aspects of their stories were emerging as particularly relevant for developing their reflective practice.

Second, a writer needs to engage in the writing process in order to create ideas and compose the narrative. We took our students through these next steps:

1. Putting together a "Literacy Bag." On the first day of class, students were assigned to bring a bag (i.e., a container, grocery bag, shopping bag) full of objects that would help describe them as literate individuals. As faculty, we shared our literacy bag contents with students. Photographs of family, pets, and well-remembered events as well as other heirloom objects were brought, helping students describe literacy and talk about it as a critical part of their everyday lives.
2. Creating a timeline. As an extension of the literacy bag activity, students were asked to construct a timeline of their literacy history based upon events they felt were most significant. In sharing these, they were able to awaken "forgotten" memories, glean new insights, and begin to articulate their stories.
3. Writing the first draft. As students participated in both the invitations to learn about the structure of an autobiography and reflect on their own literacy development, they were expected to begin composing. This first draft could be an outline, a graphic organizer, a series of vignettes, or whatever seemed to be the best way to begin.
4. Conferencing and rewriting. Response groups were organized so writers could meet regularly over the semester and look closely at their writing. Through that process, they evaluated their choices of examples, articulated their perspectives on their experiences, considered the logic and coherence of their narratives, and assessed the depth of their reflection. A rubric was created to guide along the way subsequent reflection on their lived experiences and connection to teaching and learning. Feedback based on checklists of individual goals and the co-constructed rubric was also given in writing by faculty and peers.

5. Presentation of the autobiography. Students shared their literacy autobiographies as part of an end-of-the-semester portfolio presentation. Some read aloud, some told stories, and others passed around their productions for individual viewing and reading.

Interviews followed the writing of the autobiography and the observations of their situations of literacy practice--we talked with teachers in their classrooms, at coffee shops, on the telephone, and in our offices on campus. The point of this strategy was to construct an in-depth conversation, rather than a routine interview. Some of the questions, or prompts, that helped us focus were: Tell us about your personal literacy history; What did you learn about yourself and literacy through autobiography?; and, How does this help you think about your literacy teaching? Observations of teachers' situations of literacy practice either involved visiting the classroom or viewing a video-taped recording. Our own written field notes, and in two cases, teachers' journaling about their practice further informed our observations. Lastly, these data were analyzed for the purpose of more clearly articulating the connections between these teachers' stories and their situations of literacy practice. Analysis actually began with the writing of the autobiography and continued through the iterations of interviewing, observing and writing this paper. We examined the evidence for congruence between what characteristics of teachers' literacy practice and qualities of their personal literacy histories; we searched for ways in which these teachers might have written their literacy histories into their teaching practice. This kind of examination involved both confirming and disconfirming what appeared to be evidence of links among these data.

The Teachers, Their Stories & Their Practice

Liz

Liz chose to craft a scrapbook of the most memorable examples of her literacy development. She displayed samples of her writing (e.g., letters to pen pals, stories and scripts) her mother had saved, pictures of family and friends, and miscellaneous paraphernalia (e.g.,

tickets stubs to plays or concerts, brochures of summer drama camps, book covers). These "scraps" of memories were accompanied by brief captions that provided her best re-construction and interpretation of the significance of these events and experiences. Not surprisingly, she featured several favorite books that were read to her, and that she had read, as a child. It was immediately obvious, however, that the relationships Liz had with family and friends provided a remarkably important context for her literacy development. With each and every event or experience she portrayed, literacy was transacted through Liz's relationships with others. And, her references to the role drama played in her literate development were equally important. The scrapbook was given to her mother for a Mother's Day gift that year—again a powerful sign that her literacy is situated in meaningful relationships with the people of her life.

In Liz's classroom, using drama and theater are an important cornerstone to her curriculum. She began teaching "her own classroom" in January, more than seven months after her graduation, as a third grade, long-term substitute in an ethnolinguistically diverse (i.e., there are more than 12 first languages of the children) and economically-poor, neighborhood school (i.e., at least 85% qualify for free or reduced lunch). Liz recalled that, almost without thinking about it, she began involving her students in the task of turning one of the stories in the adopted reading series into a play. From the very beginning she involved students in decision making about writing the script, designing costumes or props, and orchestrating the production of the play. From her perspective, these processes were as central to acquiring the literacy of reading a script as they were to understanding the magnitude of dramatic performance. By the end of the year, Liz's students had dramatized several stories, some as a whole class and others as smaller groups. Getting started and getting organized brought with them some frustrations for both teacher and students. They, nevertheless, are committed to further exploring the realm of possibilities for promoting literacy for everyone in their classroom through creative drama.

In her day to day classroom routines, the notion of scaffolding support through relationships is clear. Students predict, suggest, and test their "theories" constantly. She has

allowed her students the same kinds of scaffolds and supports she remembers from her own development during her grade school years.

Liz has noticed that her students have been acquiring the same sense of confidence about their literacy and a renewed sense of identity as a literate person through their work together in public dialogue, reading and writing literacy, and dramatic performances. She also noted that many of her students reported that this alternative medium of drama was one of the very first times they had experienced the pleasure and reward of becoming literate. This is something she will indeed remember. They were finding and speaking their own voices in much the same way Liz had done.

Shelley

Shelley narrated her personal literacy history through the genre of journaling. With each entry she called upon her remembrances to explore the processes by which she became literate, referring to biblical scripture to highlight the themes of her experiences and the nature of those process. For example, on her first day of school Shelley realized that the magic of literacy was about using her own words, finding her own voice:

> John 1:1—"In the beginning as the Word ...." My most potent early memory of literacy is the act of learning to read. ... I recall the feeling of almost bursting with excitement as I walked with my mother into my first grade teacher's room. ... Over in the corner, I spotted a pile of books. I had seen and touched books at my house before, but those were older ones of my mother's—they didn't belong to me. ... I was thinking that these books were for kids my age. They were crisp and made noise when I turned them. I don't know why, but turning those pages, pretending to read the words, made me feel somehow more important than I'd ever felt. I buried my nose in the pages—the fragrance was like no other I had ever before experienced: It seemed to say the books were new and just for me and the other children. ... As I practiced making ... words, I could feel a kind of electricity or ... but there was something, something I could almost touch or taste or smell...or maybe I could hear a voice . . . maybe it was my own voice. It is from that moment of discovery, frozen forever in my mind, of knowing I could decipher the scribbles on a page, and make meaning out of them, that I believe I began to glimpse the genesis of my writer self. Nothing before that moment, and nothing that has happened to me since, has ever given me a sharper sense of astonishment and delight in the possibility of my own voice.

She continued by examining experiences in which she struggled to overcome the distrust she had acquired for her literate voice; she felt ashamed of her words and how she put them together. But

Shelley also remembered how important certain people were in her life at that time, encouraging her to let go of her fear and give voice to what she had to say. She wrote:

> The words are clear in my head, but when they come out of my mouth they are often jumbled. ... I am now in my third grade teacher's, Mrs. Owens', room. ... She tells me to write about anything I want to write about. When I am writing I forget about how hard it is to get the words to come out of my mouth. On paper, the words come easily. I don't know for sure, but something in me tells me that Mrs. Owens *knows* this.

Shelley recounted that between the ages of nine and thirty-four she did not write any fiction stories, because she was severely reprimanded for bearing her soul honestly with her words on paper. However, she did write poems about growing up and giving birth, questions about her children's future, and memoir of pain and pleasure in her diaries.

In closing her autobiographical journal, she drew the conclusion that the voice in her head from her childhood is the voice she hears today when she rereads her lifelong journal and the one with which she wrote her autobiography.

> It is, rather, that by writing I am gradually learning to speak. I am gaining mastery Over language. The strangled, sputtering voice in me, which has long expressed itself in the stops and starts of inarticulate restlessness, has been trying all these years, to reassert itself in my writing. ... I hear the voice in my head. It is the one I think I heard when I was a child just learning to read. It is the voice I hear when I read aloud to myself on my birthdays. The voice of my beautiful dreams does not. It soars!

Shelley's writing was both pensive and playful, and it revealed her strong sense of the presence and power of emotionality in humans to help them make meaning. Like Liz, she revealed that literacy is unmistakably a phenomenon that exists because of real human endeavor and relationships.

In her middle school ESL classes, with students who have immigrated to the United States from Pacific, Asian and different American nations, Shelley has encouraged her students to explore and find their literate voice by reading, writing, speaking and visualizing their ideas and meanings. For instance, during a recent study of immigration, students listened to a tape recording of a song *"You've Gotta Be,"* watched a clip from the film *The Godfather*, and then wrote about the relevance of these two representations to their own stories of immigration.

Students then gathered to discuss their written responses. It is important to note that they spoke in their native languages and in English, teaching each other and Shelley words and phrases that related particularly to the theme. By the end, connections between their experiences with immigration into the country and induction into the middle school emerged; they concluded that ESL students must go through "immigration" with teachers and their peers, who are like customs' agents, kind of checking them out to see if they should enter or not.

For Shelley, there is indeed magic and mystery to literacy; it is spiritual in that it is somehow linked to the soul, and more concretely, to relationships. Her teaching reflects a focus on students' identities and voices by making sense of the world, not just "decoding" but reading the world. Becoming literate is like constructing a new language for yourself--it includes oral and written language, but it goes beyond that, involving other kinds of language. Shelley continues to allow for many different kinds of language use, helping kids to connect to one another as real people, and to express a range of ideas and meanings.

Jamie

For his literacy autobiography, Jamie gathered several family heirlooms (e.g., old-fashioned photographs, poems, prayers, stories, letters and cards, an excerpt from Tuscarora-English language dictionary with commentary on prevailing English translations) that symbolized for him not only important memories of literacy experiences but also the cultural, historical and linguistic legacy of his family's literacy. He also wrote an essay to accompany this "treasure chest" of literacy momentos, in which he recounted stories about coming to know who he was and growing up literate. In particular, Jamie closely examined how he learned as a child about his Iroquois heritage from his grandfather and articulated what this has come to mean for him as a man and a teacher. He wrote:

> For me, this [my literacy] started as a child when my grandfather told me many stories about my family, including Clinton Rickard, who is my great-great uncle. My mother's side of my family is Iroquois Indian, who are native to upstate New York. Literacy has been deeply embedded in the Iroquois Nation for hundreds of years. It has been the last 60-80 years or so, that preserving and promoting literacy of the Iroquois Nation has become a necessity.

Jamie's literacy has indeed been strongly influenced by the stories of his family history, a proud sense of identity that is fashioned out of understandings about where his family comes from, as well as who he is, and a piqued curiosity about the role language plays in making meaning.

Throughout his autobiographical narrative, he reminisced about his sense of intrigue with language, which emerged out of the times he spent with his grandfather taking long walks and listening to him tell stories in his native tongue. And, he expressed disquieting concern in his questions about its likelihood to passed on among the Iriquois people.

> To this date only a handful of tribal elders speak the language fluently, my Grandfather included. They are hurriedly trying to preserve ... the language before they all pass on. This is one of the reasons I feel it is necessary for me to learn all I can about the language ....

Jamie had determined that it is through language that meaning and memories—culture and history—are passed down from generation to generation. By retelling his stories and reconsidering their meanings, he could see how much more issues of language are with respect to literacy. Jamie gleaned new insights into what he would set out to do as a middle school literacy teacher.

In Jamie's classroom, he is sensitive to the fact that several of his students are bilingual, and some of them are emergent English language learners. Jamie does not preclude his students from studying real content because they do not "speak English proficiently." Instead, he supports their English language development, welcomes native language use in multiple ways, and participates with them in the process of becoming bilingual. In light of this, he deliberately arranges different teaching and learning situations in which he begins to learn his students' native language(s) and his students seek to learn a second language from one another. For instance, he gives them opportunity to speak the names for concepts and other content in Spanish,

Vietnamese, Korean, and Russian at the same time he is speaking them in English. His students co-teach with him, previewing and reviewing the content in their native languages. Another example of how Jamie's literacy teaching reflects his new convictions and understandings is seen in their rituals for independent reading. Jamie decided to encourage students to bring books from outside the school, related to their cultural and language backgrounds, to read. He schedules time for students to give "book talks" about these, and they hold conferences or discussion circles with peers, in their native languages, as well as in English.

Again, Jamie is offering his students opportunities similar to those he recalled from his own growing up. He is helping his students to take long walks, as he did with his grandfather, along the paths of their own culture, speaking their own language—and English—as they tell their stories and learn to negotiate what it means to be literate. In turn, he is supporting them as they search for their own voice, and identity, within an increasingly complex system of multiple and, often, constrained literacies.

Discussion

There were five salient themes that resonated across teachers' stories and their practices: a) reading the world, b) multiple sign systems, c) human relationships , d) introspection, and e) spirituality. By following the patterns of these themes across the three cases, we noticed a striking congruence between the nature of each teacher's personal literacy history and her or his situations of literacy practice. We have represented the five themes as a pattern of points that array like a star, all of which intersect a single cohering center point .

As Shelley specifically noted in her interview, "Literacy involves decoding the world, reading what is all around you and creating a language to speak what it means to you." This very idea of engaging with the real world around you and reading it in order to construct your literacy was reiterated by Jamie and Liz as well. They experienced awe, boredom, delight, fear, frustration, puzzlement, and pleasure, and they represented their lived experiences and responses

to the world in different ways. The use of various sign systems was important in each teacher's case; there was not simply one path, or a single mode of learning that promoted their literacy development. Rather, Liz, Shelley and Jamie transacted between and within multiple mediums, such as listening to books read aloud and acting out stories on stage; singing show tunes as you listen to the car radio and keeping a journal; or hearing stories told while reading the landscape around you. Their narratives also told how literacy was, and continues to be, transacted through their interpersonal relationships with siblings, parents, teachers, and other important individuals in their lives. Literacy served as a medium for interacting with an acquaintance, friend or family member; and their personal literacies developed because of these human relationships. Their stories and practices further revealed that literacy developed by means of introspection, pondering what they had experienced and what that meant for them. In other words, their literacy development was metacognitive. And, finally, they suggested in their own ways that literacy is also a spiritual phenomenon. By this they were not referring to religion, per se. For them becoming literate were seemingly spiritual in that they experienced transformations in knowing better who they were [are] and what they understood about life.

Moreover, it was immediately interesting to us that each of these themes united around the phenomenon of voice. That is, ultimately, each of the teachers remarked that finding her or his own voice was the most significant aspect of literacy development. And, in light of this, they had designed their literacy practices to encourage students in different ways to explore the possibilities of finding their own voices.

We suggest that, despite any differences in the extent to or manner in which each of the four teachers articulated their reflections on voice, there are clearly four critical points to keep in mind: 1) voice is found, it is not given; 2) it exists in the midst of real human relationships; 3) it develops through on-going introspection; and, 4) it is an expression of identity. Voice is something that arises out of the struggle to understand the world we live in; it is something that

develops in the company of others as much as in the private spaces of one's own heart, mind, and soul; and, it is the special expression of self.

These teachers have been able to look at their experiences of becoming literate and beginning to teach through the multiple lenses of autobiography and inquiry. This refraction, as Pope (1999) called it, scaffolded them to be able to articulate what was powerful and promising in their literacy development and translate that into their literacy teaching. This process of revision is somewhat like that of the anthropologist, in which it is important to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Geertz, 1983). By looking from new directions at what is all too familiar, one can see what was seemingly invisible before. One can then put a finger on what was not quite right.

Lastly, and most importantly, we noticed parallels among the genres and structure of each teacher's autobiography, what she or he remembered as significant experiences in her or his literacy history, and the types of classroom experiences each has determined to be critical for students. For Liz, the parallels are the focus on drama in her own life, drama as a mode of presenting her life, and as a literacy practice in her classroom. For Shelley, they are evident in the role that journaling has played throughout her personal life, as the genre of her autobiography, and as an important methodology for students to find and write with their own voices. And, for Jamie, there are parallels among the language he experienced with his grandfather while walking and listening to stories, the language he used to construct his essay, and the languages he allows his students to use to study content and learn English.

Continuing Our Inquiry

So, it is increasingly clear to us that understanding the relationship between one's own personal literacy history and situations of literacy practice is critical to taking ownership of reflective teaching practice. From this preliminary inquiry, we have seen that four teachers

gleaned new understandings about the connections between who they are as people and who they are as teachers.

We feel it is important for us, as teacher educators, to continue this reasearch--not just for the sake of research, but for the sake of creating, and staying true to, our own pedagogy. If we believe that reflection is indeed a teacher's way of knowing, then we must continue to situate reflection within the context of critical constructivist pedagogy as it emerges from our own practice. Accordingly, this must be as much at the core of how we learn about and know our teaching, as it is for our students to do the same.

In addition, we have begun to consider seriously the implications of this work given the press to improve professional development for inservice teachers. Since reflection is a teacher's way of knowing, we advocate for this definition to be an integral part of professional development and accountability. In today's intensely politicized debates of teacher accountability, however, a very different, in fact opposite, view is often cast. Nevertheless, we are committed to advocate that teachers must have greater autonomy with their professional development and to have the freedom to use their ways of knowing to assess and develop their practice. We recommend that given the rapid development of portfolio review for state and nationa professional certification (e.g., National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; Washington state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction), there must be careful consideration to teachers own ways of knowing themselves as teachers and their situations of literacy practice.

As we continue this inquiry project, we return again and again to our initial questions: What is the relationship between a teachers' personal literacy history and her situations of literacy practice? What is the nature of being a reflective practitioner? How do beginning teachers rerflect? How do experienced teachers reflect? Moreover, we continue to re-consider the role of autobiography as an epistemology for teacher education and professional development, with an

aim toward supporting all teachers in learning the art of reflective practice, and ways of knowing about the art and craft of teaching.

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